

Happy disability pride day!

People don't understand disability pride. They say to me: Oh yes, you should be proud, because in spite of your disability, you're so positive. You can have a smile on your face, in spite of your unfortunate situation, of the bad hand you've been dealt in life, of your sad plight...

Sound familiar? I say: If we're managing to live a good life, it's not "in spite of our disabilities," it's in spite of the prejudice we've been subjected to—the ableism that's ingrained in the fabric of our society and in our socio-economic system.

It's in spite of the lack of services and supports, in spite of the often inadequate education our young people receive, in spite of discrimination in the workplace, in spite of the poverty that's enforced on disabled people because of our for-profit health care system—inhumane health care system! Single Payer!—and of outmoded laws and policies which keep disabled people poor, in order to be eligible for services and benefits, which should be ours by right! Keep disabled people always afraid to go over the limit if they work, or if they marry, and always afraid of constant threats to those services. Right now an important Medicaid program—the "consumer-directed personal assistance program" is under attack in NYState!

It's in spite of the fear of ending up in a nursing home or other institution—so many of our people are still stuck in those hell holes—Free our People! Pass the Disability Integration Act!

If we're happy to live our lives, it's in spite of all those who think disabled lives are not worth living!

It's in spite of all the barriers—did anybody check out the protest going on this morning against our inaccessible subway system? That's 29 years after the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act! In spite of all the barriers, physical and attitudinal! In spite of the ableist bullshit we put up with every day. Is there ever a day when some stranger (it could be a friend, too) doesn't say something very stupid

and hurtful—without meaning to hurt, most of the time, because ableism goes unrecognized.

We endure and we persist, and some of us even thrive, in spite of the injustice! And yes, of that we should be proud. And we are! So I tell people “Don’t get teary eyed and tell us how brave we are. Join us in our fight. We don’t need sympathy but we can use allies.”

In no way do I want to deny the reality of impairments, or minimize the difficulties and, at times, the pain, our disabilities may cause us. I watched my husband, Danny, the love of my life, a powerful disability activist—we fell in love back in 1993 organizing the Disability Independence Day March, a precursor of this parade. I watched him lose more and more function and get sicker and sicker and die—less than four months ago. So I know. But, as ADA architect Justin Dart said, “Disability is just a normal part of the human experience, a common characteristic of a normal lifespan. Justin I love you, I hope Danny is with you! We all have this body, made of flesh and blood, with bones that break and organs that fail. Oh, yes, it can happen. When you least expect it. Ours is a minority anyone can join. Most of us, if we live long enough, will experience disability.

But if our bodies or if our brains do not work the same as other peoples’, that does not make us less valuable as human beings!

So let us understand this pride. What it is and where it’s coming from.

Ours is not the pride of flag waving Americans. Ours is the pride of the oppressed. Of those who have been made to feel ashamed of who they are. Of those who have been made to feel they don’t matter. Of those who have been made to feel unwanted.

Today is Bastille Day. Let’s break down the walls!

No walls! Neither to keep people out nor to keep people in!

No locking up people. Neither in nursing homes nor in detention centers.

Today we are all out! We will not be hidden away. We are parading our disabled bodies and saying we are proud.

And we are going to enjoy ourselves, have a good time. So many people still insist in believing our lives are sad and pitiful, so we must make sure that we never internalize that negativity. It is important that we enjoy as much as possible. Having fun for us is a political act, a revolutionary act.

So let's have fun!

Let's get on with the show!